



# Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Senator Baucus Decries Cuba Travel Ban as Drain on Anti-Terror Resources**

*New Data Show that More Personnel Work on Cuba than on Anti-terror Financing Activities in any other Country, including Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan*

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont), Ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, called on the Senate Appropriations Committee to approve draft spending legislation that would de-fund enforcement of the Cuba travel ban, calling the ban a waste of precious resources needed to fight the War on Terrorism. The House is also expected this week to consider an amendment to suspend enforcement of the Cuba travel ban.

Citing previously unreleased data provided to the Finance Committee by the Treasury Department earlier this summer, Senator Baucus noted that the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) devotes more personnel resources to prevent U.S. citizens from vacationing in Cuba than it does to root out the international sources of terrorist financing in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Iran.

“Even as U.S. soldiers and citizens face real and grave threats from Al-Qaeda and other known terrorist organizations in the Middle East, the Bush administration has decided to focus much of our scarce anti-terror resources to preventing ordinary Americans from touring Cuba,” Baucus said. “Moreover, the Bush administration has recently decided to tighten the Cuba travel ban even further, which could mean an even greater drain on federal resources that ought to be used to fight the War on Terrorism. This is an appalling misjudgment on their part, and underscores how the Cuba travel ban undermines the larger objectives of U.S. foreign policy.”

OFAC, a small Treasury Department agency, is tasked with a variety of important functions, though arguably none more important than tracking down and rooting out the sources of financial support that terrorists around the world use to fund their activities, whether here in the U.S. or abroad. Simultaneously, OFAC is also charged with administration of the Cuba travel ban, which includes the monitoring of U.S. citizens traveling to Cuba and the issuance of penalties to those who fail to secure proper travel licenses. OFAC receives direction on its priorities from superiors within the Treasury Department, as well as from the White House, and from the foreign policy objectives established by the State Department.

In response to inquiries from the Senate Finance Committee this May, OFAC provided detailed information regarding the division of personnel resources, including overhead and administrative support costs, required to meet its various agency responsibilities. Surprisingly, administration of the Cuba travel ban exhausted more full-time personnel resources than any other country or project-specific responsibility. Whereas the equivalent 21 full-time employees

are devoted to the Cuba travel ban, only 16 are devoted to tracking both the financial support used by the former regime in Iraq and the insurgents in Iraq. This also compares to the 16 full-time employees dedicated to the pursuit of the financial network of Al-Qaeda and affiliate terrorist organizations in Asia, Africa and around the world. Iran merits less than 14 full-time employee resources, while less than ten full-time employee resources are allocated to Sudan, Syria, and Libya combined. Disturbingly, activities in Afghanistan fail to receive the sole attention of even one full-time employee. North Korea gets even less attention, despite being labeled by President Bush as a member of the "Axis of Evil." The equivalent of only one-third of a full-time employee's work is directed to it. In sum, out of a total of 96 employees allocated to rooting out terrorist financing activities at OFAC, nearly one-fourth, or 22% are dedicated to the Cuba country program, despite the fact that no credible evidence has ever been offered that Cuba poses a terrorist threat to the U.S.

"Terrorists rely on international networks of financial support to carry out their sinister activities. Shutting off these international flows of financing is the key to a successful War on Terrorism," said Baucus. "Given the stakes and the difficulty of the fight, we can't afford to waste a single day or dollar, particularly when the federal budget mess constrains our ability to do the job right. Incredibly, we continue to waste precious resources on the Cuba travel ban.

"Last week, my colleagues on a Senate Appropriations subcommittee decided enough was enough and approved amendments that would suspend enforcement of the travel ban. Another amendment would make it easier for U.S. farmers who want to go to Cuba to sell U.S. food and other agriculture products. I urge the full Senate Appropriations Committee to retain these provisions and help reform the incredible, misguided waste our Cuba policy has become."

Last year, both the Senate and House voted to suspend enforcement of the Cuba travel ban. However, even though the Senate and House versions included virtually identical language, and were supported by overwhelming majorities in both chambers, the provisions were stripped from conference by congressional leaders who wanted to maintain the Cuba travel ban. In addition, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee late last year voted for the first time to eliminate the Cuba travel ban, altogether. The bill - the "Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act of 2003" (S.950) was approved by a 13-6 vote of the committee. Despite this historic vote, and the importance of the issue, Senate leadership has failed to bring S.950 to the Senate floor for debate and consideration.

In the meantime, over the past two years, the Bush administration has twice taken separate actions to tighten the Cuba travel ban. The first - promulgated in April 2003 effectively eliminated, among other things, the popular "people-to-people" category of licensed travel, enacted by Congress and utilized by a variety of groups, such as students and museums to visit Cuba as a part of cultural and academic exchanges. In addition, the 2003 rule changes also expanded the ability of Cuban-Americans to send cash remittances to relatives in Cuba. However, the administration abruptly reversed the latter rule in May 2004 when it decided to clamp down on the ability of Cuban-Americans to send cash remittances to relatives in Cuba. The 2004 rule reversals also significantly reduced the number of trips Cuban-Americans can take to Cuba - down from once a year, as previously allowed, to only once every three years. The 2004 rule reversals were perceived as an attempt to please conservative Cuban-Americans in Florida, many of whom no longer have relatives in Cuba.

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